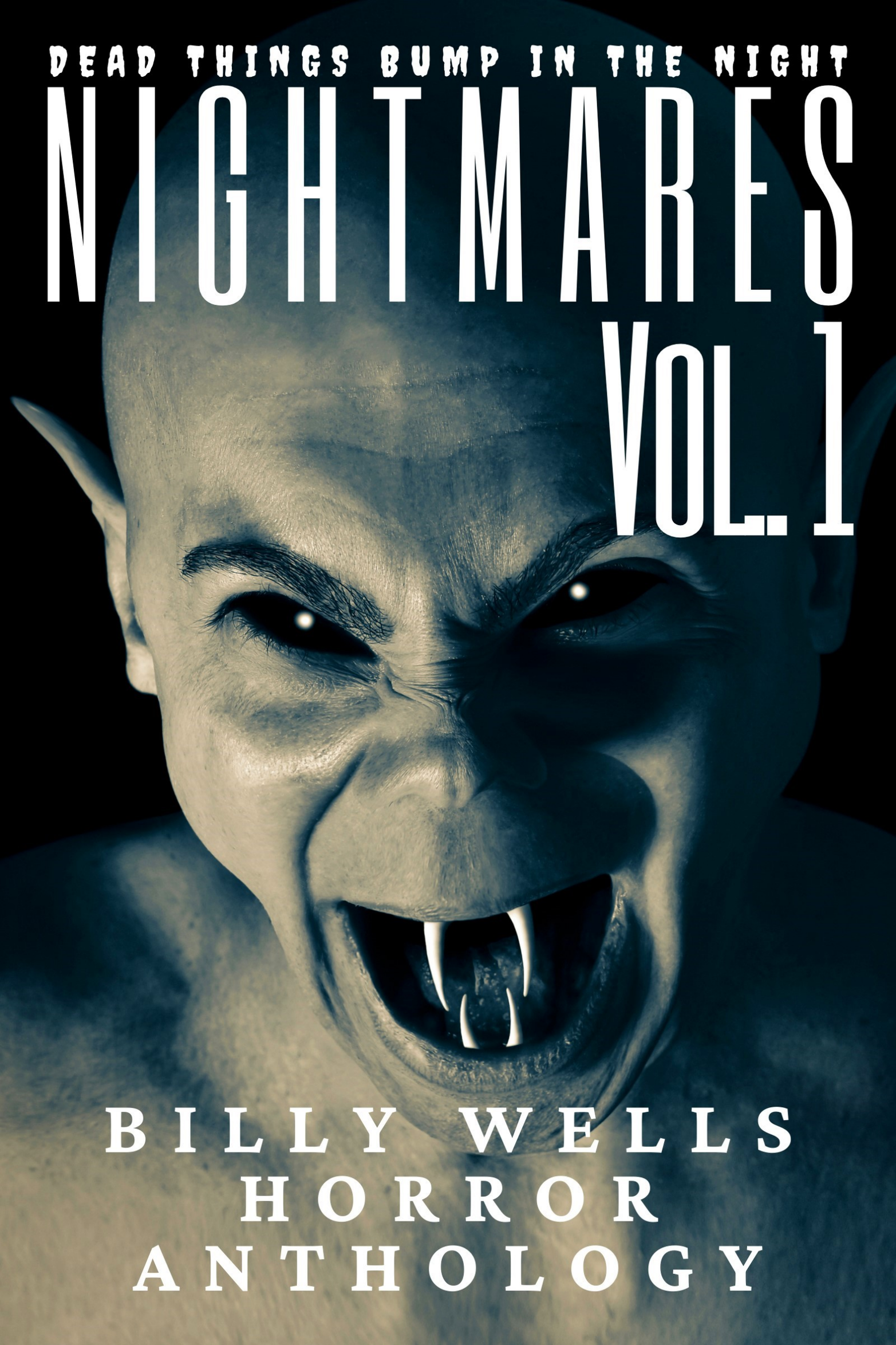
DEAD THINGS BUMP IN THE NIGHT

NIGHTMARES

VOL. 1



BILLY WELLS

HORROR

ANTHOLOGY

Nightmares-Volume 1
A Billy Wells Horror Anthology

Five Selections From
Black As Night, Shivers & Other Nightmares, Don't Look Behind You, Scary Stories-Vols. 1-5, Midnight Snacks, Scare Factory, and Stories To Make Your Skin Crawl

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No Rest For the Dead

Mort Spade popped the top on a Rolling Rock and pushed a button on the remote for his TV. He checked the guide and saw the movie, *The Body Snatcher,* had just started on TNT.

He hated to watch commercials, but he loved horror flicks so he pushed the channel button and saw the opening credits scrolling up on the screen.

“Fuck,” he said, pitching the remote on the sofa. “Black and white.” He wished the movie was in color but decided to watch it anyway.

As he watched Cabman John Gray, played by Boris Karloff, digging up fresh corpses and selling them to a Dr.

MacFarlane for what at the time must've been big bucks, Mort had a brainstorm. Why couldn't he do the same thing Gray was doing? He'd been a maintenance man at the Morningside Cemetery for over ten years, and he was making peanuts. Digging graves, mostly with a backhoe, was his primary job, along with moving dead people from various locations to the funeral home or the cemetery.

During the movie, Gray had a great business going with his horse and carriage, and Mort wanted to give it a try himself. The problem was finding someone who wanted to buy cadavers like Dr. MacFarlane in the movie.

When the movie ended, Mort went to his computer and booted up. After an interminable time, he saw the Microsoft network finally fill the screen. He googled Craigslist and put "funeral arrangements" in the search engine. A list of undertakers and research facilities came up. One stood out from the rest with the catchy slogan, "A body is a terrible thing to waste." He hit the link and was taken to a site with a large picture of a group of smiling doctors standing in front of an impressive medical building. They held a banner that read, "Help Save A Child And Dispense With Enormous Funeral Costs. Donate Your Body To Medical Research."

Wow. Maybe this would be the perfect place to sell a cadaver.

He read every word on the page. These doctors were soliciting elderly people who didn't have the money for a customary funeral to agree to donate their bodies to science upon their death.

Mort didn't know if these doctors would pay him for a body already embalmed or not, but what did he have to lose by asking. He called the number listed in the ad.

A female answered, "Edmunds Medical Research."

"Hello," Mort said. "I'd like to speak with someone about donating a body."

"Just a second, let me transfer you to Mr. Sharlaton."

Mort listened to the phone ringing, and on the third ring, he heard, "Mr. Sharlaton here. May I help you?"

"Uhh," Mort said, and suddenly realized he couldn't find

the words to put a sentence together.

“Is someone on the line?” Sharlaton asked impatiently.

“Yes. I don't know how to begin exactly,” Mort stammered nervously.

“May I ask with whom I am speaking?”

“Well,” Mort hesitated. “Actually I would like to remain anonymous.”

“I'm sorry, sir, but I already know you’re calling from the Mort Spade listing. Your name is already visible on caller ID. Are you Mort?”

“Well, yes, but what I want to ask must remain strictly confidential.”

“I understand, Mort. Many of our calls begin this way. Death of a loved one is always a ticklish matter to discuss. What do you want to know?”

“Let's say I know someone who is very sick and will probably kick... I mean pass away soon. The person’s spouse, who is responsible for paying for the funeral, has no money, but does have complete control of what happens to the body once the spouse dies. Could I...I mean my friend, donate the body to your organization without the deceased signed permission?”

“Yes. It happens all the time. All you... I mean your friend, has to do is have the loved one sign a waiver stating your friend will be solely responsible for the disposition of his or her body in the event of death. I can even fax you a copy of the form they need to sign if you like.”

Mort’s face beamed with excitement. "Let's say I place an ad like you did on Craigslist to solicit people, who will agree to use your service, and I supply you with their names. Do you have, what d'you call it ...an affiliate agreement arrangement? You know… would you pay a finders fee for every person I can get to donate their body?”

“Actually, yes,” Sharlaton replied cheerfully. “We already have several affiliates who receive finders fees for body donations.”

“Really. And how much do you pay for each corpse…I mean dearly departed?”

“Two thousand dollars is our standard fee for a deceased who expired in less than twelve hours, and one thousand for one between twelve and twenty-four hours.”

Mort could barely form his next sentence; the grin on his face was so wide. “I guess this is a crazy question, but I'll ask it anyway. Let's say the deceased is embalmed and goes through the memorial service process, but rather than a burial or cremation, they elect to donate their body to your organization after the ceremony.”

“Cadavers already embalmed are less desirable for our primary research, but we do have other uses for such bodies with universities and medical training establishments. But, we only pay five hundred dollars for those cadavers.”

“If I find a donor, are you the person I should speak with to receive my payment?”

“Yes. Since I spoke with you initially, I will be your contact for all future dealings with our company.”

* * *

The next Wednesday, Mort excavated a grave for a newly departed and closed it after the funeral. The man had died of a heart attack at the age of forty-two. He wondered if the cadaver being young would increase his payment for the donation.

That night, at three in the morning, Mort drove the backhoe to the fresh grave. There was little chance anyone would hear the machine digging since it was deep in the new section of the cemetery far from the main road. Still, the work was nerve-racking since the roar of the engine was loud enough to drown out the sound of a tank if it approached during the excavation.

Knowing he would be exhuming the body in only a few hours, Mort dispensed with placing the top on the concrete vault. He simply covered the hole with dirt as fast as he could without anyone seeing. He wasn’t used to digging up bodies only burying them, and he’d never excavated a grave at night. Even with the headlight of the backhoe blazing, the shadows of the machine’s arm rising and lowering cast eerie shadows on the gravesite that unnerved him more and more,

as the exhumation progressed.

Then, the bucket finally reached the coffin on one of its downward spirals and split the mahogany top. Mort didn't hear the loud crack of the impact and the wood splintering for the roar of the engine but he felt the vibration. He cringed at the thought of the bucket crashing through the top and squashing the body as flat as a pancake. He quickly turned off the engine to inspect the damage.

He jumped into the hole, and straddling the edges of the concrete vault, began removing the excess dirt so he could lift the lid of the coffin and drag out the body. He wasn't looking forward to handling the corpse, but the mechanical coffin lowering device only went down, not up. Consequently, the body would have to be physically removed from the coffin just like Boris had done in the movie.

Mort winced when he saw the huge crack and the long gash in the mahogany top and the scrapes along the sides where his shovel had raked across it. Finally, he lifted the lid and exposed the body of the corpse within. He chuckled when he remembered Joseph Stiff was his real name.

Stiff had a spray of dirt that had seeped through the jagged crack on his face and on his black suit and red tie. An ugly bloodworm that had also fallen inside had crawled into the corpse's right nostril and was trying to make a home there. Mort plucked it off and flicked it away like a big booger. The next obstacle was getting the body out of the coffin and into his truck without messing it up too badly.

Mort was beginning to wonder whether he had misjudged how hard it would be to make five hundred dollars grave robbing. He loved earning two weeks pay for a single night's work, but it was ball-busting labor for one man. He wished Fuzzy, his fellow gravedigger friend, could help, but he was afraid to ask him for fear he would blow the whistle.

Mort walked back to his truck in the parking lot and backed it up to the edge of the grave. Next, he took some blankets from behind his seat, opened the tailgate, and spread two of them in the truck bed and on the ground just

above the corpse's head. He straddled the corner of the vault, and reaching down and placing his hands under Stiff's arms, he dragged him on to the blanket. Catching his breath, he lifted him like a giant sack of potatoes into the truck bed, covered him with another blanket, and closed the tailgate.

Huffing and puffing, he collapsed on the ground next to his truck and thought about the joy of getting back to his place to crack open a cold Rolling Rock.

After a rest, Mort returned to the backhoe, pushed in the pile of dirt he had removed, and smoothed it over so it looked about the same as the grave had when he started.

After returning the backhoe to its assigned parking space in the cemetery lot, he went back to his truck and drove to Edmunds Medical Research. By the time he arrived, the sun was beginning to rise.

When he pulled into the large parking lot, and he saw a loading dock and assumed it must be the place where people disposed of the bodies and got paid. The interior was dark, and no one was moving about inside at this early hour. He waited.

At seven-fifty, a car pulled into the lot and parked. A young man got out, and after unlocking the door next to the receiving window, he went inside and turned on the light.

At eight o'clock, Mort saw the door to the loading dock go up. He drove alongside of the receiving window so he'd be first in line. The man inside was talking on the phone.

Mort waited for the young man to hang up and talk to him, and finally, he noticed Mort and said, "Good morning. May I help you?"

"I'm making a delivery. This is my first time, and I'm not entirely familiar with the process. Do I give the purchase order to you?"

A slot opened in the window and a receiving box opened. "Place the P.O. inside, sir. Let me take a look."

Mort complied. The man smiled when he looked at the purchase order and said, trying not to laugh, "This is a loading dock for supplies… things like equipment, paper goods, drugs. We don't accept cadavers here."

“I'm sorry. Like I said this is my first delivery. Where is the proper place to deliver a cadaver?”

“Usually, our drivers pick up the body of the deceased at their residence, the hospital, or the morgue and take it to the arranged drop off point. I don’t remember anyone making a personal delivery from a truck. Do you have the name of a contact I can call?”

“Yes,” Mort said nervously. “Mr. Sharlaton. Call him. He's the one I spoke to about the arrangements.”

The clerk picked up a phone and called the name he’d been given. Mort saw the man's lips moving but didn't hear what he said.

Finally, the voice returned over the loudspeaker, “Pull to the side over there next to the trash cans. Someone will be here shortly.”

Mort hoped his failure to follow the correct procedure would not threaten his relationship with the facility before it had even begun. He saw a black van approaching from around the corner of the building. It pulled alongside his truck. Two surly men who looked like Stallone and Schwarzenegger in their prime, strong enough to rip his arms off, got out of the van and approached him.

The first one with a large spider tattoo on his left cheek bellowed, “Where's the stiff?”

“He's in the truck bed,” Mort replied, mesmerized by the man’s bulging biceps.

“I’m Sydney. Do you have a purchase order?” he barked.

Mort handed him the form and asked, “How do I get my money?”

“Would you prefer $450 cash now or a check in two weeks?”

“I'll take the cash now,” Mort said with no hesitation. “This is my first delivery. Did I fill out the form correctly?”

Sydney glanced at it and said, “Looks good to me.”

“Will I receive a 1099 for the money I receive?”

“A what?”

“You know, a tax form reporting the money you paid

me during the year."

"Do you want one?" Sydney said skeptically.

"Well, not really. But I'll do whatever you and Mr. Sharlaton want."

"Do you plan to bring in more stiffs or is this the only one?"

"I hope there'll be more, but I don't know for sure."

Sydney handed Mort a business card through the window. "If you come again, call the number on this card an hour before you plan to deliver, and either me or my brother, Sherwood, will meet you at the back of the parking lot to pick up the stiff."

Mort couldn't believe what he was hearing. He hoped he wouldn't go to jail. This sounded too good to be true.

Sydney and Sherwood, who had tattoos over most of their visible skin, pulled back the blanket covering Andrew Stiff and scrutinized him. They seemed pleased. Afterward, they transferred the body into the back of their black van.

Mort wondered if they would pay him or stiff him. Sherwood came to the driver's side window and gave him an envelope containing $450 cash. After he watched the van drive away and disappear over the crest of a hill, Mort drove to his apartment and knocked down a six-pack of Rolling Rock. He felt like he was riding on top of the world.

Over the next year, Mort delivered twenty-five cadavers to the Edmunds facility and received $450 for each one. Each week, he religiously placed an ad on Craigslist and in the local newspaper, soliciting people, who wanted to donate their body to science.

Mort was working much harder than he ever had and his effort was paying off. His bank account was growing steadily. Life was good as long as no one tried to exhume one of the corpses he'd dug up and sold to science. Occasionally, Mort received email agreements for body donations, but most of the corpses still came from cadavers he dug up the night after he buried them.

* * *

Finally, one night after struggling with a particularly

obese body, Mort did not feel well. In spite of the chills and fever he'd been experiencing for several days, he drove to the Edmunds' parking lot to deliver the rotund cadaver to Sydney and Sherwood as he usually did. After this delivery, Mort had already decided he would take a well-earned two-week vacation and rest up before he killed himself working too hard to get rich.

When Sydney and Sherwood arrived in their black van after receiving Mort's call, they pulled alongside his truck and found him slumped over the steering wheel. They piled out of the van, and after opening the truck door, Sherwood felt for a pulse. He couldn't detect one.

The brothers removed Mort's lifeless body from the truck, laid him out on the pavement, and took turns pounding on his chest for five minutes without a response. They had grown to like the gangly old codger and were genuinely sad he had apparently had a heart attack and died. After a few more moments of heartfelt bereavement, they loaded Mort's body into the van with the cadaver he'd brought for them and delivered both bodies to the Edmunds facility. They received twenty-five hundred dollars for their trouble. It went a long way toward relieving their momentary pangs of remorse.

Later that morning, the facility shipped the embalmed cadaver Mort had brought with him in the truck to a university for dissection by medical students. Since Mort had not been embalmed, Sydney and Sherwood delivered him to the National Highway Safety Administration. The brothers heard they used cadavers as test dummies to study the frame-by-frame carnage of a body involved in a head-on collision.

As soon as Mort's body arrived at the test site, two men in black sweat suits removed him from the van and strapped him into a Kia compact. In this particular experiment, the small car was scheduled to have a head-on collision with a tractor-trailer loaded with concrete stanchions used in the construction of highway bridges.

The brothers hadn't had breakfast, and feeling hungry, they stopped just down the road at Krispie Kreme for some

donuts and coffee.

Sitting outside at a table munching on the sugary delights, the brothers had an unobstructed view of the test site. As they listened to the roar of the bellowing mufflers and smelled the acrid fumes of the diesel exhaust, they were comforted they had left strict instructions in their wallets, their vehicles, and their living wills their bodies would not be donated to medical science under any circumstances.

“Poor old Mort, I'm going to miss him,” Sidney said mournfully. “He was the best good old boy we ever did business with.”

Sherwood grinned, "And he was stupid enough to give us a 10% commission on every stiff."

"That, too.” Sydney sighed and sipped the steaming hot coffee. “I'd put a flower on his grave if he had one, but after the eighteen-wheeler pulverizes his body, they’ll haul what’s left to the land fill.”

“Well, would you rather have NASA test its landing systems with his corpse? He'd be burned to a crisp upon impact after a teeth-rattling trip into outer space.”

“Yeah, but not all the landings are bad. NASA isn’t that incompetent. I'm sure he'd have a 50-50 chance to come down in one piece.”

“Sydney, it's a no win situation. If he wasn’t incinerated the first time, they’d probably keep shooting his corpse into space until he was.”

“I don't think so. The corpse would be all dried out by that time. They wouldn't send it up more than once.”

“No matter what you say, Mort is lucky. The National Highway Safety Administration is the best way to go. Boom! You're obliterated in one quick ball busting collision. Better that than be bloating and wasting away in the sun for months to better inform law-enforcement about decomposition.”

“You're right, Sherwood. That would be the last way I'd want to go.”

“I understand some university science departments let the military use cadavers donated to them to test landmine resistant footwear.”

“If the people who donate their bodies to science only knew what the universities, the military, and the government agencies actually do with them, we'd have to find another job.”

Sydney chuckled to himself and then said, "I saw an article in *Reader's Digest* that said in the old days when a corpse wasn't embalmed, sometimes they put a bell outside the grave with a pull-chain leading inside the coffin. If the dead guy was just temporarily out of it and woke up after being buried alive, he could ring the bell for help.”

“Fuck. Can you imagine if Mort wasn't really dead and he woke up strapped into the seat with the tractor-trailer loaded with concrete barreling down on him?”

A loud beeping sound from inside the Kia compact awakened Mort from his temporary, catatonic stupor. He'd had this malady several times before in this life. It was always annoying to wake up in a strange place with a bunch of strangers gawking at you. But, it was funny to see their faces when you opened your eyes and got up after they thought you were dead.

This time he decided to really give these clowns a scare. He screamed "Boo!" and tried to jump up abruptly to scare the living shit out of whoever was around him. But to his dismay and utter shock, he found himself strapped in a seat, unable to move his limbs. He opened his bleary eyes and tried to focus.

The last thing Mort saw before he was squashed like a grape run over by a steamroller was the dazzling chrome ornament of a big-busted woman with a fifteen-inch waist affixed to the hood of a cherry red tractor-trailer.

The Ice Man

The telephone rang, and seeing it was Audrey from the bridge club on the caller ID, Emily answered with a cheerful hello.

“Emily, I hope it's not too late to call, but there’s something I think you should know.”

Audrey's voice trailed off, and Emily thought she might have lost the connection, “Audrey, are you still there?”

“Yes, I'm still here. I know it's hard to believe knowing me, but I'm at a loss for words. I think I jumped the gun when I called. I picked up the phone and punched in the number, and now I don't know how to put the words together I want to

tell you."

"Gee, Audrey, I've heard of calls like this, but never received one. This sounds like you know a secret I should know, but you can't tell me."

"I suddenly realized that after playing cards with you for five years, I really don't know very much about you other than the way you bid and the way you play your hand. Maybe you're the kind of person who wouldn't want to know what I was going to tell you."

"Audrey, stop with this bullshit. Tell me why you called, or I'll come over to your house and ring the doorbell until I drive you insane. It sounds like this secret is heart attack serious. You're scaring me. It can't be that bad, can it?"

The line was silent for an embarrassing period of time, and then a timid voice an octave higher than before said, "If I tell you, you've got to promise me you'll never tell anyone I told you."

"Christ, Audrey. Cross my heart and hope to die with sugar on it. *Dexter* is coming on in two minutes, what is it?"

"Is Chuck there with you?"

"No, he's in Chicago for the week. I'm supposed to pick him up at the airport tomorrow night."

"That's what I thought you said at bridge last night. Well, damn the torpedoes, here goes…." After a beat, she muttered, "On second thought, I can't tell you on the phone. Why don't you catch *Dexter* on demand and meet me at the American Grill. I think you're going to need a drink when you hear what I have to say."

"You sure have raised the bar on my curiosity. Okay, I'll meet you there in twenty minutes, and you'd better not chicken out."

When Emily entered the restaurant, she saw Audrey and Angelo, her boyfriend, in a booth at the rear of the restaurant and joined them. She took a seat across from Audrey and said, "I'm surprised to see you, Angelo. What are you doing here?"

"I think we should keep our voices low," he whispered.

Emily looked around and found no one seated near

them, and turning back to face them said, “The suspense is killing me.”

Audrey took Emily's hand, and with a concerned expression, she began, “Angelo went to a bachelor party last night at GoGo's Titty Bar in Livingston. He saw your husband there with a group of very tough men in black suits. He recognized one of them as a mafia hit man he went to high school with.”

Emily looked at her and smiled broadly, “You brought me down here for this? What’s the joke?“

Audrey didn’t reciprocate with a smile, but simply said, “I’m sorry, Emily, but I’ve never been more serious in my life.”

“This is crazy. I can’t believe you could really tell me this with a straight face. Like I said, Chuck is in Chicago at some business meeting.” Looking more intently at Angelo, Emily asked, “How do you know my husband anyway?”

“Remember the victory party we were both invited to after Obama won? We sat together, and I spoke with your husband, Chuck, for over an hour that night.”

The server came to the table and took their order for three gin martinis straight up with olives.

Angelo continued, “While we were talking, Chuck told me he worked for a company named Black World International. Since I never heard of them, I asked what they did. After he gave me the age-old line that if he told me what they did, he would have to kill me; he just said they were a top-secret intelligence contractor, and he couldn’t say anymore than that. We laughed and had some more drinks. I couldn’t believe it when I saw him with Rubber Fingers Basilico last night.”

“Rubber Fingers?” Emily remarked.

“That's the nickname we gave him in elementary school. He's double-jointed and could bend his fingers backwards further than anyone in the school.”

“I know you have no reason to lie, so you must have my husband confused with someone else. Chuck and I have been married for almost twenty years. He's the kindest man

I've ever known and such a good father. He never missed one soccer game or piano recital our daughter ever had. He goes to mass every Sunday when he's in town; and as far as I know, he's never even had a parking ticket."

"That's all fine and good," Angelo said, sitting back in his chair as the server placed three biscuits and three martinis on the table and scurried off. "But what do you know about Black World International?"

"Chuck said everything he does involves national security, and a stipulation of his employment is never to disclose any confidential information to anyone. Even me. He told me that on the night he proposed, and he made me promise to never pry into his business affairs. He indicated there was an element of danger in his work, and it was critical that his family live their lives below the radar. I made that promise then, and I've never broken it."

"Don't you see, this fits right in with his secret life with the mob," Angelo shot back. "Have you ever heard anyone call him the Iceman?"

"Oh that." Emily replied, chewing on a fingernail. "A number of his friends from high school call him that. I asked him about it once, and he said he got the nickname from his special ability to hit a home run for the team when they needed it most. He wasn't normally a great hitter, but he was like that Yankee player years ago they called Mr. October."

"Reggie Jackson?" Angelo's face lit up.

"Yes, that's the guy. Like him, he had ice water running through his veins when the chips were down. He hit an inordinate amount of homers in the clutch during the post season."

"I'm sorry Mrs….."

"Call me Emily."

"Emily, I suspect he made that up. The Iceman is the name the police gave the most heartless mafia hit man in history. The grapevine says what he did to his victims before he killed them defies the imagination in terms of brutality and sadism."

Emily's eyes widened in bewilderment, trying to get her

mind around what Angelo was telling her about her husband and the father of their precious daughter.

“My husband would never do anything like what you are describing. I don’t know who or what you saw or think you saw, but we should drop this. It’s getting us nowhere. I can still catch *Dexter* on the tube before I turn in.”

“I know what Angelo is telling you is unbelievable, and I must be insane to take a chance on coming here,” Audrey said nervously. “Angelo begged me not to get involved in your problems, but when I heard the prostitute your husband left with last night was found dead in an alley this morning, I couldn't hold my tongue any longer. I just couldn't bear to think my favorite bridge partner was living with a homicidal maniac whose trademark is snipping off his victims fingers and toes and eating them like buffalo wings dipped in A1 sauce.”

Emily’s hand shot to her mouth at the thought, and fumbling for her napkin, she knocked over her untouched martini.

Audrey withdrew a folded section of the morning paper from her coat pocket and opened it on the table. “The headline read “GO-GO DANCER FOUND DECAPITATED IN IRONBOUND SECTION OF NEWARK.”

Emily looked into Angelo's dark eyes and shaking her head in hopes he would change his story the second time around, she pleaded, “You’re sure you saw my husband leave with this woman last night? You weren’t drunk at the time, and there’s not a shred of doubt in your mind?”

“I'm sorry, Emily,” Angelo said apologetically, “there’s no mistake. I was no more than ten feet away. The girl was on something. She must have had way too much booze or drugs. She was so wasted, your husband and Rubber Fingers had to carry her out the front door.”

Emily sat with her mouth agape as she looked at the two of them in disbelief. “This nightmare couldn't be happening,” she thought. Chuck was the only man she’d ever loved, and the only man she’d ever had sex with. He’d been so kind and so considerate of her feelings all through

the years. How could he be cheating on her with some hooker from Newark?"

Audrey pushed the news clipping across the table in front of Emily, "Didn't you see this write-up about the headless go-go dancer someone found in the alley in Newark? You still read the paper every morning, don't you… when you're having your coffee?"

Emily focused on the headline and after skimming the fine print said, "Yes, I saw it, but I didn't read the details. It didn't strike me as special that a prostitute had been found dead in Newark."

"That was the girl your husband left the strip joint with. The newspaper article couldn't go into the gory details but it says the M.O. of the brutal murder suggests it was the work of a sadistic killer the authorities have named the Ice Man."

Emily's face turned ashen, and her hands started to shake, "I can't believe this. My husband is like a saint."

Angelo took her hand and looked into her teary eyes, "I'm sorry, Emily, Chuck is definitely not a saint, far from it. Enter 'Iceman' in Google and you'll read about one of the most notorious killers in American history and the awful things he did to the people he murdered. He's a monster without a shred of feeling or remorse for his victims. That's how he got his nickname; it was nothing about baseball."

"If my husband is such a monster, why are you risking your lives telling me about it?"

Audrey and Angelo looked at each other oddly, and Audrey replied, "As I said before, Angelo begged me not to tell you, but I really care about you after all these years. I know your daughter and she's adorable, and I know how kind and considerate you are. I'm really afraid for you. I agree, we took a chance coming here tonight, and based on who your husband is, our lives are in your hands. Maybe I'm crazy, but I think I know you well enough to believe you wouldn't, pardon the expression 'fuck us' after we tried to help you."

Emily took Audrey's hand and said, "You've been a dear friend for sure, and I know you're sincerely trying to

help me, but at the same time, what your telling me is so beyond belief."

"Look, Emily, what we've told you is between us. We're not planning on telling anyone else. It's up to you what you do with the information. All I can say is if you stay with him, I can't believe there will be a happy ending."

"You're not going to the police?" Emily asked, looking from Audrey to Angelo.

Audrey looked around at the empty tables in their section and said, "We're not stupid enough to go to the police. We don't have any hard evidence. We might cause your husband a lot of trouble if we tell the cops he left with the murdered woman, but I don't want to think about what he would do to us if he got off."

"Everything you've told me seems to fit together, but I need to think this over before I do anything rash."

"We understand. Who do you believe a bridge partner or your husband? Do you have any money you can get your hands on if you need to move out quickly?"

"I guess I could write a check for a few thousand from our checking account, but I've never done it before. As far as our stocks and bonds, I don't have a clue. Chuck takes care of all of that."

"Well, Emily, go home and check it out. You have a lot of thinking to do. Don't blame Angelo; I'm the one who had to tell you. I'm sorry. I really am. I'll pick up the check; it's the least I can do after ruining your life."

Emily smiled weakly and rose from the table. She hadn't had even a sip of her martini, but she seemed unsteady on her feet.

"Are you okay to drive?" Audrey asked, with a worried look. "Do you want me to take you home? Angelo can drive your car."

"No, I won't be all right, but I can drive. Thanks."

Emily left the restaurant, leaving Audrey and Angelo at the table.

"Well, it worked like a charm. I think we're $25,000 richer," Angelo beamed. "I can't believe you were able to

take a few things you found out playing bridge and create a scenario that Chuck is a serial killer."

"You know it was much easier than I thought. Chuck has that crazy Secret Service job, and he can't tell Emily anything about it. Therefore, he could work for the Mafia. His job puts him on the road often, allowing him to have a secret life. He is a model husband and father, which would dispel any idea he could be into something bad, so Emily has never had a reason to doubt him or ever check up on him. This was the perfect scenario."

Angelo's smile covered his whole face as Audrey continued reminiscing, "When I saw that the *Ledger* said the authorities thought the notorious Ice Man had murdered the prostitute in Newark, I remembered Chuck's nickname from baseball, and tied in the hit man angle. I knew Emily read the newspaper every morning before going to work, and I didn't think she would miss such a horrific headline."

"Unbelievable!" Angelo shouted with approval as dollars signs filled his mind's eye.

"The last piece was connecting the prostitute to Chuck leaving the club. Saying Angelo recognized him at the Titty Bar made the whole story tie together with a neat bow."

"Pure genius!" Angelo said, beaming with pride at Audrey's uncanny ability to fabricate something plausible from a series of unrelated facts,

"I must say," Audrey agreed, "there was one point the story seemed so real, I almost started to believe it myself."

"It was pretty dark in here. I hope the cameras picked up everything," Angelo said, removing the hidden microphone tucked inside his shirt.

The server came over and said, "How did I do? I don't have much experience carrying martinis on a tray. I think I spilled half of them on the way to the table."

"You were almost perfect," Audrey replied, Emily was too upset to notice anything you did. We didn't even drink the martinis you served. You were a tad slow on cleaning up the drink Emily spilled, but I think it went better than I ever dreamed possible."

Audrey spoke louder into her hidden mike, “Well, am I right, Harry? Tell me you got it all.”

A voice in her earpiece said, “We got it all. I think this will be the best show ever on *Believe It Or Not*. You deserve the prize. You may even have a shot at the hundred thousand dollar super prize money.”

“What now?” Angelo asked, almost floating on air with excitement.

“We are supposed to head over to Emily’s house for the celebration and the reveal.”

“The reveal?” Angelo replied, looking puzzled.

“Yes, you know…” Audrey explained, “When they tell her we fooled her, and it was just a segment for the *Believe It Or Not* TV show. I understand that all of her neighbors, her associates from work, and her immediate friends will be at her house when they pop open the champagne.”

“What about Chuck? Will he be there, too?”

“No. He won't be there in person; Barney, the producer, said he’s still in Chicago at an important business meeting. As of the time we made the initial call to Emily, he hadn't been able to reach him. All his calls have been forwarding to voice mail, but they are hoping to patch him in on a live video connection at the house.”

After a few more high fives, the camera crew began packing up their equipment. Audrey and Angelo left the restaurant laughing loudly and headed toward their car in the deserted parking lot. Both of them were beaming with accomplishment and the anticipation of receiving their $25,000 prize money.

“What's the first thing you're going to buy when we get the check?” Angelo asked.

“I've always wanted to go to Europe, but I've never had the money. What about you?”

I always wanted the 1956 Mickey Mantle Tops baseball card in mint condition to complete my collection.”

Just before reaching their Toyota, Emily stepped from the shadows of a large shrub and barked, “I can't believe you motherfuckers figured out my husband is the Iceman.”

Audrey and Angelo stood with their mouths agape, staring into the barrel of a big black gun with a long silencer.

“What you didn't figure out is that I taught Chuck everything he knows.”

Emily placed a neat hole in the middle of each of their foreheads with two barely audible, precision shots that sent both of them toppling backwards to the asphalt. She felt a warm mist of blood on her face as she peered down at her dear bridge partner and Angelo lying in a heap with a stew of brains and gore decorating the back end of their Camry. She surveyed the parking lot and noted two white vans with TV lettering parked in front of the entrance. Opening her car door and getting in, she drove into the street and headed for home.

She couldn't wait to tell Chuck how her bridge partner had made him after he had fooled the police for so many years. She was also going to ask him about being in the Newark strip club instead of Chicago.

When Emily pulled into the driveway of her house at 11:30 p.m., she noticed the light in the living room that was controlled by a timer was not on. She guessed the bulb must've burned out.

Unlocking the door, she stepped inside, and immediately, flashbulbs and spotlights blinded her. She wondered how much blood splatter peppered her clothes and her face as the TV cameras rolled into view. Across the room on a gigantic monitor, she saw Chuck’s bewildered expression as someone handed her a champagne glass, and a houseful of familiar faces shouted “surprise” in unison and started pouring the bubbly for a toast.

Desecrations

Angus Scumm, the funeral director at Scumm's Funeral Parlor, called the Mount Hope Police Department at 9 a.m. The duty officer forwarded the call to Sheriff Omar Dunkin, who was enjoying a jelly doughnut with his coffee and morning paper.

"Dunkin," the sheriff answered gruffly, wiping a dollop of raspberry jelly from his chin.

"Sheriff, this is Angus," the agitated voice said breathlessly, "Put down that jelly doughnut, and come to the funeral parlor as soon as possible. Someone has defiled two of my dearly departed in their caskets during the night. I can't imagine what depraved monster could have done something so despicable right before the funeral."

"Settle down, Angus, before you have a coronary. I'll be there in five minutes." The sheriff put down the phone, crammed the remainder of the doughnut into his mouth, and drained the cup of coffee.

Five minutes later, the sheriff pulled into a parking space in front of the funeral parlor. The lot was deserted except for two hearses parked on the corner.

When Dunkin opened the entry door to the small

vestibule, Scumm met him just inside. Dunkin did a double take at the unnatural pallor of the undertaker's ashen face. He looked paler than the corpses in his viewing rooms. He thought Scumm should touch up his own face with a little makeup like he did his clients. *Who wants to speak with someone who looks like a vampire about a funeral?*

Without any small talk, Scumm said, “Follow me,” in a deep voice much like Lurch had on the Adams family TV show and led the sheriff into the first viewing room to the left.

Dunkin noticed the temperature decrease markedly as he entered the dim interior, only lighted by several fake candles with eye drop bulbs. About thirty bouquets of flowers had been strategically placed about the room. The overpowering scent of all the flowers assaulted the sheriff's nostrils and made him slightly dizzy, on the brink of sneezing. In the back of the space, Dunkin saw the open casket illuminated by several recessed lights in the ceiling. About thirty chairs were arranged in three rows of ten in front of the casket.

Dunkin followed Scumm until he stepped to the side to allow the sheriff an unobstructed view. The Sheriff's face paled and his mouth fell open, as he stood horrified at the mutilated corpse before him.

The dead man's forehead had been crushed by something heavy, possibly a sledgehammer. Based on how the upper skull was almost completely mashed into mush, he'd been struck many times.

"Have you ever seen anything so hideous in your life?" Scumm asked, covering his mouth with his hand in a markedly feminine gesture.

"I've seen a few skulls pancaked in car crashes, but I admit, I've never seen a head obliterated like this. It almost gives the corpse a cartoonish appearance with the head so much smaller than the torso."

Dunkin knew as soon as the words left his mouth how unfeeling his ill-timed comment had been. He felt Scumm's rage on the back of his neck and his own face reddening, but the funeral director didn't say anything.

Dunkin felt a little queasy as Scumm turned and led him to the adjacent viewing room. He could feel the heartburn coming on, and he didn't have any Tums with him.

This viewing room looked different. The lights were brighter, which made it seem more cheerful, if that were possible.

Across the room, Dunkin saw the disfigured face of a woman laid out in a striking red dress in a noticeably more expensive casket with additional adornments and carvings on the side panels. The room was much larger, with many more bouquets and twice as many chairs filling more than half the space.

After reaching the coffin, the sheriff stood aghast at the unspeakable horror before him. The MO was similar to the male corpse, but the blows to the head had flattened more of the lower face than the upper half. One of the blows had smashed the bridge of the woman's nose and placed a deep indentation between her eyes, which made them protrude grotesquely outward from the corners.

"Well," Dunkin said, after feeling another twinge of queasiness, "Although the bludgeoning of the woman's head is somewhat different, I assume the same person did the grisly deed. Do you lock the doors at night?"

"Absolutely,"' Scumm said decisively with obvious agitation in his voice. "Whoever did this broke a window in the back door to get in."

The funeral director paused a beat, then continued, "If you catch the monster who did this, what would he be charged with?"

"Desecration of a deceased is a misdemeanor, not a felony in this state. Moreover, I'm sorry to say, if this is the work of some teenagers out for a sick thrill, they'll probably just have their wrists slapped since the victims were already dead and nothing was stolen."

"Can you imagine how Mr. Jenkins felt when I told him what this psycho had done to his wife? It's a travesty of justice, and doubly so if the person at any age can do this and get away with it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Scumm. I don't make the laws, I only uphold them to the best of my ability."

The sheriff's stomach told him he needed to leave quickly. His ulcers were playing havoc with his digestive tract. And, the squashed heads and the severe acid reflux he'd gotten from the coffee and doughnuts didn't help. "I suggest you close up shop until I can get Fred Bishop and a few of his crime scene crew out here to take a look. Since both victims are already deceased, this won't be a murder investigation, just a breaking and entering offense. I'll call you after I talk to Fred."

Dunkin left Scumm standing in the vestibule with a long, thoroughly disgusted look on his face.

Dunkin drove back to town, still reeling from the horrific images of the battered skulls of the two corpses. He knew images such as these would remain in his memory forever.

Mount Hope was a small town in the Appalachian range with a population of slightly more than two thousand people. Main Street had fifteen stores clustered around the main intersection. The rest of the buildings on the street were residences. It was a quaint place where everyone knew everyone else. Almost no visitors came to Mount Hope to stay. The few who grew up here rarely left. Small farms surrounded the town nestled at the bottom of the mountain.

Dunkin knew every teenager who lived in the area since he attended the high school football and basketball games. He could not think of any one of them who could have committed such a heinous crime. Moreover, he couldn't think of any adult who could've done it either.

After calling the medical examiner to investigate the crime scene, the sheriff drove north on Route 261 toward Backward Holler to speak with James Jenkins, the husband of the second victim.

When he pulled into the gravel driveway of the doublewide, he saw Jenkins on the front porch with his hands covering his eyes, sobbing. When Dunkin approached him, he looked up, and seeing the sheriff, he wiped his face on his sleeve.

"Sorry to bother you at a time like this," Dunkin said. "But I need to ask you a few questions."

"Who could have done this horrible thing?" Jenkins sobbed. “I’ve been racking my brain ever since Scumm called. I know everyone in this town, and for the life of me, I can't think of anyone who could've done this."

"That's why I'm here, James. I didn't think you'd know anyone who hated your lovely wife so much they would want to do this, but I had to ask."

"My wife was like an angel. She didn't have a single enemy all her life. She went to church every Sunday and everyone loved her. She was a beautiful, caring person."

"Everyone in town thought a lot of your Elizabeth, no doubt, and the same with Moe Childress, the other victim." Dunkin paused and scratched his eyebrow, then continued, "Elizabeth and Moe were probably just unfortunate random victims of circumstance. My guess is whoever did this would've done the same thing to anyone they found at the funeral parlor. It probably had nothing to do with your dear wife, Elizabeth."

"What you're saying makes a lot of sense, but if I ever find out who did this, so help me God, I will bash his fucking head into a bloody pulp."

"I know how you feel, James, but please let me do my job. I won't bother you with any further questions, at least for right now. If you think of anything, call me. Again, I'm so sorry this happened to God-fearing, upstanding townsfolk like you."

The sheriff returned to his cruiser and headed toward town. He didn't know what to do next since he didn't have a clue where to start. Hopefully Fred Bishop would shed some light on the matter, but he doubted it.

It was late in the day when Bishop stopped by the Sheriff's office with his findings. Dunkin leaned back in his chair and dropped his pen on the desk. "Well, Fred, did you find anything we can use to get to the bottom of this mess?"

"Nary a thing, Omar. Whoever did it didn't leave a clue. All I can tell you is what you already know. The perp used a

heavy blunt instrument, probably a sledgehammer on both bodies."

"I assume there won't be a DNA analysis."

"The perp didn't leave anything behind to analyze. But you're correct. The town budget doesn't call for a DNA analysis unless a murder has been committed."

The sheriff scratched his head and kicked the battered trashcan under his desk. "Have you ever heard of such a thing happening before?"

"Never, Omar."

"Have teenage pranks reached this level of depravity in our small town?"

"I certainly don't think so, but I can't think of another reason off hand. What can possibly cause someone to crush the skull of a dead person in a funeral parlor?"

The sheriff took a large bite from his jelly doughnut and sipped his coffee. “I may be reaching for straws, but it occurred to me over at Jenkins' place, that TV show, *The Walking Dead*, might have planted a wild hair up somebody's ass. Maybe some scatterbrained, misguided nimrod is hell-bent on killing potential zombies. The only way to put a zombie down for good on the show is to destroy his brain with a bullet, a sharp stick or knife, or to crush his skull with something heavy. A sledgehammer would be handier than carrying a big rock around."

"You might have something, Omar. If this weren’t a teenage prank, it would explain why someone would do such a horrible thing to two good townsfolk who didn't have an enemy in the world. Maybe some screwball who watched the show believes the zombie apocalypse is real and any dead person will return to life to eat the living unless they take action."

"Hot damn. I wonder if someone has escaped from the mental hospital in Montauk. Would they let crazy people watch that show?"

"Damned if I know, give them a call." Bishop paused and his face brightened. "One thing's for sure. If this is what's really happening, there will be more victims as soon

as someone else dies around here."

The sheriff picked up the phone and called the Montauk Sanitarium, which was about thirty miles north of Mount Hope.

The Sheriff's excitement fizzled when the doctor in charge assured him no patient had escaped from the facility in over ten years. Dunkin thanked the doctor, sighed with disappointment, and hung up the phone.

Fred Bishop replied, "Nothing lost, nothing gained. Anyway, it's more likely some old geezer who lives on the outskirts of town has become senile and thinks the zombie apocalypse is real."

"You're right. And he's visiting funeral parlors at night with his sledgehammer."

They heard the phone ring at the main desk. They heard the duty officer answer it and speak to the caller. After hanging up, he said, "Omar, that was Henry, James Jenkins' son. He stopped at his father's house and found him dead from an overdose of sleeping pills. The teenager wanted to know what to do next. I told him we'd be there shortly."

The sheriff and Bishop headed for Jenkins' residence. After an initial inspection, Bishop confirmed the suicide. Jenkins had even left a note on the kitchen table saying he didn't want to go on without Elizabeth. The Sheriff called Scumm and told him to come for the body so he could begin preparing for a double funeral.

Once the body had been removed and the hearse had pulled away, Dunkin said to Bishop, "I'm sorry Jenkins took his life, but this is our chance to see if someone will come to the funeral parlor tomorrow night to crush his skull."

"And you and your men will be waiting for them. Right?"

"Right." The sheriff nodded with cold, bulldog determination.

Scumm wasted no time embalming Jenkins and preparing the body for a viewing the next evening. *The Daily Chronicle* carried the story and the times of the viewing and the funeral.

Dunkin and his men had parked their vehicles in a secluded spot a few blocks away from the funeral home. Once inside, they started playing Rummy by candlelight at a table in the corner of Jenkins' viewing room. Scumm had dimmed all the lights in the interior when he closed up and went to his residence across the street.

Around 9:30 p.m., they heard a pane of glass shatter in the back. The four men eased from their chairs, drew their weapons, and moved behind the open doorway leading into the hall.

Dunkin and his men heard someone moving through the hall toward them. Then a shadowy figure darted into the room. As soon as the intruder entered, the sheriff and his deputies rushed in behind him and turned all the dimmers to full light. They recognized the elderly mountain man, dressed in a plaid shirt and jeans and holding a large sledgehammer, as Leonard Biggs.

After the initial shock of being confronted in the act, Biggs let out a bloodcurdling scream, and raising the heavy weapon, he veered to the left and bounded toward the coffin housing James Jenkins' body. The three deputies tackled him, wrestled him to the carpet, and wrenched the sledgehammer from his grasp. The sheriff stepped forward from behind and cuffed the struggling, screaming man.

The lawmen all knew Leonard Biggs, a taxidermist who lived alone at the base of the mountain. Having lost his weapon, Biggs's eyes bulged with fear as he continued to glare in horror at the coffin on the far side of the room.

When Dunkin slapped him hard in the face, Biggs stopped screaming and shouted, "What's wrong with you people? Don't you know the dead are coming back to life and feeding on us?"

"Leonard," the Sheriff said calmly. "You've been watching too much Walking Dead on TV. There's no such thing as zombies. You're confused. I know that show is realistic but it's all fantasy. You need a shrink and some pills to bring you back to reality."

Leonard kept struggling and retorted in a frenzy, "I

don't know what the fuck you're talking about. There's no reception on the mountain, so I don't own a TV. I've heard people talking about that show, but I've never seen it. My father had a heart attack and died last night after a long illness. While I was carrying him from the woodpile into the house, he came back to life and attacked me. I got away from him by the skin of my teeth and was able to get to my shotgun. I blew a hole in his stomach as big as Texas, but he kept coming until I bashed his head in with my bowling ball.

The sheriff nodded agreeably at Biggs, who continued to struggle like a wild man. Dunkin figured the old timer had drunk too much moonshine and had a bad dream. His deputies had such a hard time holding him down, the sheriff gave him a kick in the head, and he stopped moving.

Before anyone could say a word, Dunkin's phone rang, and he answered. He heard a lot of commotion in the background.

Then, Homer McWeed, one of his deputies he'd left to man the office, shouted excitedly, “Sheriff, there’s been a bad accident at Boomer's Crossroads. A Mack truck pancaked two vehicles loaded with families. The trucker's okay, but all eight of the passengers in the cars are mangled up. We moved the first car off the road and are using the Jaws of Life to free the bodies from the second car now. The EMTs are en route to the funeral parlor with the four victims we removed from the first vehicle. Fred Bishop is on his way over there now to take a look at their remains."

"Okay, McWeed, I’ll get out there as soon as I can. Leonard Biggs is the screwball who desecrated the two corpses at the funeral parlor. We caught him red-handed trying to sledgehammer James Jenkins' corpse.”

"Really. That's incredible. I used to hunt with the old geezer. Well, Sheriff, take your time. Everyone's dead here except for the trucker. Me and Harry will…"

Dunkin heard a piercing scream in the background. "What's happening, McWeed?”

"I can't believe what I'm seeing right before my eyes."

"What is it?"

"Several of the dead people Harry and I laid out in a row on the shoulder just got up and attacked the trucker who was having a smoke next to his semi. Three of them are sprawled on top of him now."

"McWeed, listen to what you're saying. They couldn't have been dead if they're still walking around. They must be pissed off at the trucker for causing the accident."

"Negative, Sheriff. The first two had their guts hanging out and the third one had his chest caved in by the steering wheel. The fourth one, who had both legs severed below the knee, is also crawling on the ground toward the trucker. I've never seen anyone so dead as these four, but they're still walking around like nothing happened. Well, except for the one with no legs. He's crawling."

The sheriff stood speechless as he listened to his deputy blabbering on about what was happening at the crossroads. Then, Leonard Biggs came to and started screaming in his ear again, "Look, McWeed, I can't process what your saying. We have things under control here so I'll be on my way over there shortly. Do what I would do until I get there."

The sheriff heard a piercing scream. "McWeed, what's happening?" There was no response. "McWeed!"

Then, Jerry Klondike, one of the sheriff's deputies at the funeral home, announced he had to take a piss and hurried into the hall.

After Klondike had taken only a few steps into the hall, he rushed back into the room with a weird look on his face, quivering with fear, and wheezing breathlessly, "I found Scumm on the floor. He's totally messed up. Some kind of animal mauled him. He's all blood and guts."

"Wha…?" The sheriff began. Then, he heard another piercing scream on the phone and gunshots. "McWeed! What's happening now? McWeed! Speak to me!" He didn't get an answer from his deputy, but heard only weird noises in the earpiece that reminded him of hogs feeding. "McWeed!" he shouted, but heard only the sound of ripping,

tearing, slurping, and unintelligible grunts.

The two EMTs who had moved Jenkins' body to the funeral home appeared in the doorway. Dunkin saw patches of blood and gore on their white uniforms and insane hunger in their glaring, maniacal eyes. Four mutilated accident victims followed behind the EMTs. They rushed at the deputies guarding Biggs, and the officers opened fire on the throng of ravenous undead. They kept firing worthless bullets at them until the zombies overcame them and started feasting on them.

Biggs, with his hands and feet cuffed behind his back, tried to crawl away, but he too succumbed to the bloody teeth of the ravenous throng.

Dunkin fired four shots into their backs before he realized the bullets had no effect. The last two bullets blew away the tops of two of their heads and these zombies slumped forward and stopped moving.

The feasting undead and the bodies blocked the only door from the room. The sheriff tried to reload, but his hands shook so badly he dropped the first two shells. He finally loaded the next two successfully when the bloody corpse of Scumm blundered through the doorway and began crawling over the mound of dead bodies toward him. Dunkin couldn't believe how fast the undertaker could still move with the huge cavern in his midsection and a missing right eye.

The sheriff retreated backwards and fired both bullets at Scumm’s head. The first shot missed entirely, but the second found the mark between his eyes. The remaining half of Scumm's body toppled like a tree with a bloody thud on to the floor.

Dunkin reloaded his gun and while the auto accident victims feasted on his deputies, he fired at point blank range and blew away the backs of their heads until all of the corpses in the room had stopped moving.

Dunkin was still reeling from the life and death struggle when something else crawled through the doorway and slithered toward him like a large reptile. Ghastly trails of intestines followed the thing like a tail moving from side to

side behind the half torso.

The sheriff stood his ground and fired a lethal shot through the top of its head. Then, Dunkin heard something move behind him and turned to see James Jenkins climbing from his coffin. The sheriff stood in awe at the wonderful job Scumm had done on Jenkins face. The corpse's complexion seemed as radiant as a male model on TV. Dunkin wanted to conserve his final bullet so he withdrew his billy club and pulverized Jenkins' head until it looked similar to his wife's corpse in the casket in the other room.

Dunkin rushed from the room, bounded out the front door, raced to his cruiser, and headed toward home. He punched speed dial for his wife, Madge, but she didn't answer.

"Madge, pick up the phone," he pleaded again and again, but he received no answer.

He saw groups of shambling zombies already marauding his neighborhood when he arrived, and with no hesitation, he squashed a few with his cruiser as he barreled toward his house at the end of a cul-de-sac. Oddly, just like his house, he didn't see a single light on either side of the street. It was almost 11 p.m., too early for Madge or Mindy to have gone to bed. Gruesome thoughts bombarded his mind as he exited the cruiser. His heart beat like a jackhammer. The front door to his house was slightly ajar. Dunkin stood paralyzed with fear at what he was about to see. He didn't know if he could go on if anything happened to Madge and his daughter, Mindy.

He drew his gun from the holster. He knew he had one last bullet in the chamber. He didn't know if he had another bullet; he hadn't had time to check. He had a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach, a deep emptiness he had never known. He thought he was about to find out how Jim Jenkins probably felt before he took the pills that ended his life. With all the strength he could muster, he pushed open the door and stepped into the darkness.

The house lights came on and blinded him. A raucous roar in unison of "Happy birthday, Omar" filled the room from

the throng of over fifty dear friends, blissfully drinking and making merry. They had started the party some time ago and must have been waiting in the dark for him to arrive. Most of those attending looked shitfaced.

Everyone raised their glasses. Dunkin's next-door neighbor, Knott Long, proposed a toast. The sheriff returned his revolver to its holster and stood dumbfounded and speechless as Madge rushed to embrace him and gave him a kiss.

The celebratory din and the blazing lights at the end of the street alerted hundreds of zombies combing the neighborhood in search of fresh meat. Madge handed Dunkin a glass of his favorite cocktail, a gin and tonic, as something thumped loudly against the front door.

The closest neighbor turned quickly, opened the door wide, and shouted festively, “Come on in!" before he saw the horde of walking dead standing there with blood dripping from their mouths. The horde stormed inside and fell upon the merry, unwary, shitfaced partygoers.

Dunkin thought about Madge and Mindy for a second. Then he selfishly used his last bullet on himself.

Santa’s Not Coming To Town

It was Christmas Eve and only a half an hour before Santa’s time with the children would end. Chester and his mother had waited in the long line at Macy's department store for almost an hour to see him.

Finally, a fat little boy, with a triple chin and ears so large he looked like he might take off and fly, rose from Santa's lap and joined an obese woman standing off to the side.

Chester's mother placed her hands on his shoulders, and nudging him forward said, "It's your turn, Chester. Don’t keep Santa waiting."

The eight-year-old needed no prodding or reminder from his mother. He'd been waiting to speak to Santa ever since he’d opened his presents under the Christmas tree the previous year.

For the third year in a row, Santa had not brought him his favorite video game, *Luigi’s Mountain: Dark Moon*, the one all his friends had and loved to play most. He had been a good boy most of the time, and there was no reason for Santa not to reward him with the one present he wanted

more than anything.

Deep down Chester worried his parents might be partly responsible for Santa's denial. They were much more strict about everything he was allowed to do than his friends' parents. They never let him drink soft drinks or eat burgers from Mickey D's. He could never have candy or ice cream. He couldn't watch horror movies or anything rated PG. He hoped he would never find out it was his parents telling Santa not to bring him toys. That would break his heart.

Every year, the kids in his class made fun of him when he was the only one who had no presents to show them when they returned to school after the holidays. Not only did he not receive the video game, Santa never left a single toy under the tree. He only left underwear, socks, pajamas, shirts, pants, worthless stuff no eight-year-old could care less about.

After so many heartbreaking disappointments, the only explanation must be the fat bastard in the red suit must not like him for some reason. Consequently. Chester was furious and hell-bent on revenge.

He knew he was being selfish, but this year he had decided if he couldn't have any toys neither would all the other kids in the world. As far as he was concerned, not only had Santa not been fair to him, he'd been cruel. Consequently, Chester wanted him dead and had been planning his demise all year.

Unfortunately, coming up with the way to kill Santa without anyone knowing he did it was a difficult problem. What could he do sitting on Santa's lap with his mother and many others watching him? He thought of bringing a black widow spider or a poison snake, but they could kill him as easily as Santa if they bit him. It was too dangerous.

A few weeks before Christmas, his prayers were answered. He overheard his father, a veterinarian, telling a client he injected animals with something called pentobarbital to put them to sleep when they were too old and sick to go on living.

The elderly client explained he didn't have the heart to

put down Old Ironsides, a Hereford bull that had been on the farm since he was a little boy. He wanted Chester's dad to do it, but wondered if the drug was strong enough to put down his bull weighing eighteen hundred pounds.

His dad said he had a large syringe he'd used to put an elephant to sleep when the circus had come to town one year. Chester had never heard of the drug and wrote it down the best way he could until he could look it up on his computer.

After searching the web, he discovered the state of Texas began using the drug in 2012 to execute death row inmates. He also learned Missouri only used a single dose to execute Joseph Franklin in 2013. Chester got excited. This drug was exactly what he needed to kill Santa.

Finally, today was Christmas Eve. Chester was the last person in line to see Santa, and he was going to make sure nobody received presents this year, if he had his way. He brought the biggest syringe his father had in his medical bag filled with pentobarbital in this coat pocket. He'd wrapped it in heavy gauze and was careful not to stick himself.

Chester hoped the dose would be enough to kill Santa. If not, hopefully it would be enough to put him to sleep until Christmas was over.

As he did with every child, Santa lifted Chester off the ground and placed him on his pudgy right knee.

After a hardy "Ho, ho, ho," the rotund man dressed in a red suit with white fringe, and long white beard asked, "What's your name, little boy?"

"My name is Chester Winkle."

Santa's face brightened as if this information triggered a memory from previous Christmas visits.

Then, Chester whispered in Santa's ear he had to blow his nose. Santa chuckled as the little boy turned away to get a tissue from his coat pocket. But instead, he extracted the syringe wrapped in a wad of gauze, and before Santa realized what was happening, he plunged the needle into his neck and pushed the plunger completely down.

Santa grabbed his throat and looked at Chester in

shock and amazement for a split second before his eyes rolled up into his head and he slumped backward in the big armchair.

Chester wasted no time jumping down from Santa's lap and shouted, “I think Santa is not feeling well."

Several store employees rushed forward and checked the vitals of the unconscious Santa. One man said he probably suffered a heart attack. No one gave Chester and his mother a second look as they hurried away from the pandemonium surrounding Santa toward the parking lot.

Chester tossed the syringe into a storm drain he noticed next to the space where they’d parked. As his mother fastened him in with a seat belt, she said, "Chester, don't worry about Santa. He’s a little sick right now, but he'll still be coming to our house tonight just like he always does every Christmas."

Chester gave her a confused look. "I don't think so, Mom. He looked very sick"

"Trust me, he'll be all right, so don't worry. If need be, Santa will send one of his helpers from the North Pole to take his place tonight."

"It's okay, Mom. I'm not worried."

Chester wondered if he'd killed Santa or just made him sick. He also wondered if the police would be coming to his house to arrest him.

Since the youngster felt completely drained from his ordeal at the mall, he hardly ate any dinner. After a few bites, he told his mother he was extremely tired and wanted to go to bed early. After all, there was nothing to look forward to in the morning since Santa wouldn't be making the rounds this year.

At midnight, Chester was awakened by the sound of something falling over downstairs in the living room.

He yawned widely, struggled out of bed, and peeped out of his bedroom door into the hallway. He heard someone moving about downstairs and went to the railing to check it out. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Santa decorating the Christmas tree in the living room, looking as

spry and healthy as ever.

Each year Santa put up the tree and decorated it while his mom, dad, and himself were asleep. There was never a tree or any decorations at their house until Christmas morning.

Chester was devastated. He couldn't believe the drug hadn't worked. Santa was delivering presents all over the world tonight, just like always.

Then he noticed Santa didn't look at all like he had at Macy's. He looked much younger, thinner, and much shorter. His mom was right. This was not the real Santa, but a helper from the North Pole who had taken Santa's place this Christmas. Apparently, the drug had worked to put the real Santa out of commission one way or another.

Chester down the hall to his dad's home office, removed the biggest syringe in the medical bag, and filled it with pentobarbital, just as he'd done before. Then, as silent as a mouse, he sneaked down the stairs, came up behind Santa, stuck him in the back of neck, and emptied the vial.

Santa spun around and glared in disbelief at Chester, standing before him with the humongous syringe. Before he could utter a word, he swooned and slumped to the carpet. After a brief episode of spasms, Santa's helper lay still with his eyes wide open. Chester grinned broadly, knowing he had successfully stopped both Santa and his helper from delivering toys to the world's children this year. And, hopefully, forever more.

As he turned to climb the stairs to return to bed, he paused at the Christmas tree and looked at the presents under it. Three packages wrapped in pretty paper and ribbons had his name written on them. He picked up one, stuck his finger through the paper, and peeked inside the small hole.

Chester turned and gave Santa, lying motionless on the carpet, a swift kick in the groin, and whined in disgust, "Just like I thought, more fucking clothes."

Gor

Bart Jenkins saw movement from the right and stood frozen. He didn't move a hair for fear his prey would detect his presence and scurry away. He turned his head toward the movement almost imperceptibly.

Then he saw a patch of brownish fur protruding from behind a tree about fifty yards away.

A young doe nibbled on a leaf, unaware that danger lurked nearby. Bart moved slowly behind a pine tree a few feet in front of him to hide the lifting of his rifle into a shooting position. He rested the end of the barrel on a small knot protruding from the tree at eye level and placed his eye to the scope. Lining up the animal’s heart, which was just below the shoulder in the crosshairs, he took a deep breath, let it out, and held it as he slowly pulled the trigger.

A red puff of blood colored the air around the creature's shoulder just before the deer’s legs gave out, and it toppled to the ground.

When the hunter approached the doe, he saw its frightened eyes were open, and it's body quivering with fear

and the pain of its lethal injury. Blood pooled under its belly. With each beat of its heart, a small spurt of blood added to the pool forming on the ground.

Bart always hoped the animal would be dead when he reached the body, but apparently, this shot did not hit the spot where he had aimed.

Bart never liked to shoot an animal a second time when it was down, but in this case, he had no choice. He couldn't let it suffer. He knew better than to get too close to a dying animal. Too many hunters had been badly injured or even killed when a wounded deer in its death throes struck at them with its hoofs.

Gor, the alien thing from deep space, had grimaced from the sudden repercussion when he heard the shot. In the blink of an eye, he felt a sensation of loss he had not felt since he'd left his parents on their dying planet to find another planet where he could live. He crash-landed in a spaceship in this very clearing.

He'd seen the human enter the forest with his thunder stick and knew it fired small missiles. However, since no humans had come to the forest for so many years, Gor hadn't fully understood the danger the man presented when he first saw him.

But the instant Gor had heard the loud noise; he knew something terrible had happened. He could feel it in every fiber of his being. He moved like a panther through the underbrush, closer ever closer to the man beast. He'd smelled the stench of the red liquid on the wind. The reek of it hung in the leaves and sickened him. He'd smelled the stink of death many times, but this time, it had a peculiar burnt overtone that wafted from the direction of the interloper.

A light cloud of smoke hung in the air, and a deep, foreboding stillness had fallen over the forest. The skies seemed darker than the alien had ever remembered. All the animals in the vicinity must have found a hole to crawl into or a thicket where they could hide. Nothing stirred, except the man beast advancing quickly through the trees with his

thunder stick. For the first time since he'd come to Earth, he felt a vast, suffocating loneliness.

Gor had the ability to take on the color and the texture of his surroundings at will. His ability to camouflage himself and to become invisible to all the other creatures on Earth was one of the reasons he had survived unscathed for so many years. He rarely needed to use his special power, but just before the human passed by him, he'd morphed his skin into a coat of green and brown that disappeared into the colors of the forest.

The hunter walked right by and didn't have the slightest awareness he was there. Gor moved stealthily and silently a few feet behind him completely undetected.

And then, the alien saw his friend, Kali, lying motionless on the ground in a pool of the red liquid he suddenly remembered humans call blood. Her eyes were open; and her heart still beating, but he could see she was suffering and very afraid.

In the forest, Gor had seen many of his friends come to the end of their lives. Sometimes from sickness, sometimes at the hands of a predator who sought them out. Survival of the fittest was the law of nature. But, Kali's death felt wrong somehow. The alien was angry and very sad he would never see his beautiful friend again. The fearsome hunter had an unfair advantage against his animal friends with his awesome thunder stick. They were at his mercy. He could violate their enchanted sanctuary and snuff out the life of any animal he chose any time he wanted.

As the alien watched the hunter standing over Kali's body, a blind fury rose within him. He despised this human more than any other living thing. The brute had cold calculating eyes and a shaggy red beard. He could smell the man's sweat and his sour breath. His reek almost gagged him.

Gor watched in horror as the unfeeling bully fired another shot into Kali's head. He watched him kneel down and slit her belly open with his sharp knife. The alien felt his loathing escalating into a maniacal frenzy as he watched his

friend's intestines slip through the long gash and fall out upon the ground.

Gor had seen wolves rip apart many of his friends over the years. He'd watched them feast on them as well. It always made him feel sad, but the wolves were his friends, too. He tried to protect all animals as best he could, but he could never take sides. Death was nothing personal, only survival. This was different. This was a travesty of justice and should not be allowed to continue.

The hunter tied a rope around Kali's' neck and dragged her unceremoniously through the woods to his truck.

* * *

Ten days later, another human came to the forest and hunted for three days. On the final day, he killed Moona, an elderly moose who was minding his own business, chewing on a piece of grass. A month later another human came, and then another. The peace and equilibrium of life that had been so heavenly for so long had changed, and it appeared it would never be the same again.

Several of his friends had been killed and more would follow. The animals were at the mercy of the hunters and were incapable of defending themselves. They chose to hide rather than to attack or retaliate against the man beast.

On Nebulus, Gor had been a warrior where a fang for a fang and a claw for a claw was the rule. On his planet, if something ate your offspring, you would eat theirs, and this would continue until there was no more offspring to eat on either side. He grew up in an environment Earthlings would call *a dog-eat-dog world where no one took shit from anyone.*

Gor had been blissfully happy, living among the animals in the woods since he landed on Earth in 1989. His spaceship had been damaged beyond repair when it crashed into the trees. He knew he would spend the rest of his days here. Before leaving his dying planet, Nebulus, he had studied the ways of the earthlings and knew he would always be an alien among them. He feared if he were captured, the humans would lock him away and study him

for the rest of his life, as they would an experimental lab rat.

Although he possessed high intelligence, he looked more like an animal than a human in his natural state. Therefore, he decided to live in the forest with the animals that befriended him and offered him no threat. The inhabitants of Nebulus were vegetarians so he existed on the plants, foliage, and berries he found in the forest and never had a reason to harm animals to survive. He'd learned to love living on Earth in peace and harmony until that miserable day the hunter killed Kali. As an alien, he had special abilities his animal friends did not have. It was up to him to teach this hunter and all the rest a lesson they would never forget.

* * *

A month later when another hunter came with his thunder stick, Gor watched him from afar. This human was not as adept a hunter as the others before him. He fired five shots over a period of four hours, two at a buck, two at a rabbit, and one at a squirrel. He was a miserable shot and didn't come close to hitting anything. Consequently, Gor decided not to punish this pitiful excuse for a hunter since he had not harmed any of his animal friends.

* * *

A week passed before the first hunter with the red beard came again. His first shot picked a crow from a tree limb. Gor had never befriended a crow, but it saddened him to see the poor creature torn apart and fall to the ground.

This man's aim was deadly, and during the course of the two days he hunted, he killed Ramba, a buck, and Munda and Gisel, two does. All three were Gor's friends.

After the hunter disemboweled them, he dragged them one at a time to his truck. Gor followed each time and watched the hunter carefully. At the end of the second day, when red beard was leaving, the alien silently climbed into the bed of his truck and hid under a tarp.

When the hunter reached his home, Gor slipped from the back of the truck into some shrubbery along the side of the house under the cover of night. As the evening

progressed, Gor watched the hunter and his family eating dinner at the kitchen table. The man had a wife and two small female offspring, who kept giggling in their highchairs. They all looked very happy.

Gor couldn't tell if they were feasting on one of his three animal friends the hunter had taken from the forest over the two-day period. He'd seen the hunter take a cooler into the garage after he arrived home, but he didn't know what was in it.

Gor listened to the man's wife moving things about in the kitchen for about a half hour before the light went out in the garage. The man finally went inside the main house. Gor assumed the family had eaten something else that night since the wife had called the man to dinner shortly after he left the garage. Maybe, they were eating something the hunter had killed on a previous hunt.

The next morning, Gor watched the hunter, now dressed in a business suit, leave in an automobile right after sunrise. While it was still dark and very few lights on in the nearby houses, the alien tried all the windows and doors around the house. He found the final window he tried unlocked, and he crawled inside. Immediately, he smelled something cooking and heard the woman begging her offspring, who appeared to be twins, to eat their cereal.

All at once, she left the two little females in the kitchen and climbed the stairs to the second level. Gor quickly moved like a panther into the bright room that reeked with the smell of some kind of cooked meat. The two twins continued to goo and gurgle in their highchairs, which were close to a table set with several plates and pieces of tableware.

Gor heard the woman coming back down the stairs and wasted no time snapping the necks of her offspring. When she burst into the kitchen and saw him, and then what he had done, she screamed so loud it hurt his sensitive ears. Gor had misjudged how easily the first twin's neck would break, and he had inadvertently wrenched her head completely off and placed it on the tray of her highchair. He

exerted far less energy with the second one and simply let her body slump backwards in her chair with her head lolling to one side.

Gor couldn't stand the pain in his ears caused by the mother's earsplitting shrieks so he shoved his claw into her mouth, separated her jaw from her face with a mighty pull, and continued pulling it down her neck until the screaming stopped.

Her blood sprayed all over the beige table, the countertop, and the floor, as well as Gor's green scaly body. The woman flailed the air wildly with her arms until she fell into a heap on the tile floor.

After the woman stopped moving, Gor wondered what would make the most horrific impression on the hunter when he returned home. He spent a considerable amount of time obsessing over how he should stage the three bodies to get the maximum effect he thought would dissuade other hunters from coming to his home in the woods.

Gor decided to hang the first little female by her feet from the foyer chandelier of the sixteen-foot ceiling.

Then he returned to the kitchen and placed the headless female's body on a large serving dish in the center of the dining room table like a large turkey. He found some string, and after breaking a few bones, he tied the arms and legs together so they fit perfectly on the platter. He placed the head on a dinner plate and covered it with a large napkin.

What to do with the hunter's wife? Finally, he decided to emulate what the hunter had done with his animal friend in the other room. First, he severed her head, and then chopped up sections of her arms, legs, and torso. After wrapping the pieces in freezer paper, he placed them in the freezer with the other wrapped pieces of his friends the hunter had cut up after eating dinner.

Afterward, he went to the basement to see what he could use for the project. He found just the right size piece of plywood under the workbench. Taking it back upstairs, he mounted the hunter's wife's head on it and attached it to the

wall in the den. His mount didn't look as professional as the ten-point buck hanging next to it, but he thought it would make a lasting impression on the hunter, particularly with her broken jaw hanging down on her neck. She truly looked hideous, in his opinion.

Gor admired his handiwork in each room for a while and was very pleased with the results. He scribbled out the following note and left it on the kitchen counter:

> I killed and mutilated your woman and your offspring. Now you know how I felt when you slaughtered and butchered my three friends in my forest last week. Tell all the other hunters this is what will happen to their loved ones if they ever return to violate my home again. Gor.

* * *

Bart returned home from work in the afternoon and saw the unspeakable horror and the note Gor had left for him.

His first thought was to commit suicide. He went directly to his gun cabinet, withdrew his Colt 45 revolver, loaded it, and placed the barrel in his mouth.

With his finger resting on the trigger, he started reciting the Lord's Prayer as he looked up at his wife's mutilated head mounted on the wall next to the ten-point buck he'd killed last year. The monster that did this fiendish act had placed a quarter in each of Abigail's eye sockets.

He knew beyond a doubt, there couldn't be anything in hell that could approach the horror of his wife's face with the jaw torn away from her head and dangling on a portion of her severed neck. The appalling half-grin of her upper row of teeth without the bottom row took his breath away. But as he sat wanting desperately to end the mental anguish too overwhelming to bear, he could hear his poor wife's gut-wrenching cry in his mind for him to grow some balls and deal with the fiend who had murdered her and his precious daughters.

His sobs gave way to a fit of rage he had not known could live inside him. He threw down his Colt and shook his fist at the picture of Jesus staring at him from the wall. *How*

could there be a God in heaven who could allow this? He picked up the phone and called 9-1-1.

Fifteen minutes later, the sheriff and his deputies arrived on the scene with the rescue squad and the ME. One by one, his loved ones were removed in body bags as his father and mother tried to console him as best they could. But nothing they could say could ease the pain he felt in his heart and his very soul.

A team of police combed the forest for six days where Bart had hunted the week before the murders and found no trace of a killer lurking in the woods. They wanted to pursue other possible leads as to who could have perpetrated such a horrific act but were clueless as to where to start. The cryptic note left by the killer was all they had to go on.

* * *

Days passed and the funeral broke Bart's heart again. There could only be a closed casket for his wife due to her horrific facial injuries. This was far better for Bart to deal with emotionally than seeing his two little girls on display in their tiny caskets. It was the saddest and most heartrending experience of his life. He knew it would be branded in his memory until his dying day.

The next morning at sunrise, Bart decided since the police were getting nowhere, he would get this fiend named Gor's attention. He thought he knew just the way to do it.

He kept reading the note over and over trying to make sense of it. The way it was worded was extremely bizarre. This depraved maniac said he killed and mutilated his wife and children because he had slaughtered and butchered three of his friends last week in his forest. The murderer said he wanted him to know how it felt and to tell all hunters to stay away from his forest or the same thing would happen to their families.

Bart had never killed a human being except during the conflict in Afghanistan years ago. He had only killed wild animals for sport like thousands of other hunters during hunting season. So, Gor, whoever he was, had sought revenge on him, not for killing three humans, but three

animals. He remembered killing a buck and two does the week the maniac had mentioned in the note. How could a human be friends with an animal? He could love them, but the term *friends* didn't make sense unless Gor was an animal, and that couldn't be. *Could a warped human being look at life that way? It would take a real screwball, but he knew the world was full of them.*

Also, why did he say to keep out of *his* forest? Normal people understood ownership, but this weirdo didn't seem to. Bart had purchased 5,000 acres of woodland three months ago to hunt. He wasn't a trespasser; he was the owner and legally entitled to hunt on his land whenever he chose.

Bart didn't understand where Gor was coming from. Had he escaped from an asylum and was running wild in the forest? Was he a modern-day Tarzan? A human living with wild beasts?

Whoever or whatever he was, Bart had not the slightest sympathy for him no matter how he got that way. He would follow him to the ends of the earth if need be and tear him limb from limb if he could get his hands on him. But thankfully, according to the note he left, that wouldn't be necessary. The police had searched and found nothing, but Bart believed the madman was still hiding in the very woods he owned. Did this misguided weirdo actually think he could get away with murdering Bart's family without repercussions? *Unbelievable!*

* * *

A week later, Gor was munching on a succulent plant, listening to the birds and the locusts singing. A cool breeze whispered through the green mansions of his beautiful forest. No hunters had come since he had killed the last one's family and left the warning. All was right with the world again. His woods were teeming with his many animal friends going about their daily routine to survive.

In the distance, Gor heard the whir of helicopter blades. In seconds ten choppers rushed into view, each with two large silver bombs hanging from its undercarriage. The alien stood in horror as the first copter dropped its payload.

Each bomb fell through the air and exploded in a wall of flame, incinerating a large section of the forest. Over a ten-minute period, the intensity of the fire burning out of control turned his world from green into a fiery inferno yielding only death and destruction. Everything beautiful around him was transforming into black, smoldering ashes. One after another, the other nine helicopters dropped their bombs until the entire forest as far as the eye could see was ablaze. An acid rain enveloped the area that no living thing could tolerate and stay alive.

Gor assumed all of his friends had been burned alive or suffocated from the fumes of the deadly incendiary substance. As he burrowed deeper and deeper to escape the wall of fire sweeping across his paradise above him, he realized his brutal attack on the hunter's family had undoubtedly led to the utter destruction of everything he knew and loved.

Knowing it was his fault, he stopped burrowing. What was the point in living? His friends were dead; his paradise destroyed. He was an alien on a distant planet populated by earthlings who would never let him live among them in harmony.

He lay in the depths below the raging fire, inhaled the acrid fumes seeping into the earth around him, and stopped trying to stay alive. For the first time in his life, he gave up and let the black abyss envelop him.

* * *

Days later, the alien awoke in his earthen tomb, groggy but still alive. He knew there could be side effects that could kill him later but the fire had not reached him, and the fumes had not killed him as they had his animal friends.

He crawled out of the hole and saw the wasteland that had been his home. In the midst of the ashes, he saw a white post someone had driven into the ground among the rubble with a sign that read:

> Gor, unless you are Superman, and I assume you are not, you are dead. I would spit on your grave if I could find it. If you did survive somehow, I am confident the

Mark 77 bombs incinerated the majority, if not all, of your animal friends. I learned how to use this terrible stuff at Tora Bora in Afghanistan, and I had to call in some special favors to get it.

I wanted you to know how it feels to be solely responsible for your “friends” extremely unpleasant deaths.

Be aware, I own these woods. Not you. I can do anything here I want. If you are alive, get your sorry ass off my land. Find another rock to crawl under. You are trespassing, and if I find you, I will tear your heart out if you have one.

Bart Jenkins, owner.

The alien stood glaring at the words on the post. The hunter had retaliated the same as he would have under similar circumstances. How could he have thought otherwise? The anger he had felt when the hunter had murdered his friends had softened, even after their scorched bones lay strewn across the ruins of this vast wasteland.

Moving northward from a high hill, Gor could see the green of another forest far away, so, he headed toward it. After several hours of walking, he finally reached a road that separated acres and acres of blackened rubble from acres and acres of beautiful forest.

He saw a gate, and a road behind it leading into a lush wilderness. A sign on the gatehouse read: Private property. No trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted. Bart Jenkins Owner.

Gor ignored the sign and easily hopped over the fence and disappeared into the undergrowth. He heard the familiar song of many birds and the intermittent animal sounds of all the species he's known in his former homeland. He longed to make new friends, but somehow he didn't want to start at that moment. It saddened him to know Jenkins might eventually kill whoever he befriended when he came to hunt.

The alien decided he would not tolerate such a life any longer. He knew where Jenkins lived. After all, he'd been there before.

* * *

Later that night, Bart sat in his den watching TV. He had an uncanny feeling, Gor was still alive and would be coming for him tonight. He had a submachine gun on his lap, and he knew how to use it.

If Gor had survived the MK-77s, he was either an extremely lucky son of a bitch and was not there when the bombs exploded, or he wasn't human.

Earlier Bart had booby-trapped the yard with high explosives that would kill a T-Rex. This was his only line of defense. If the explosives didn't work, the machine gun wouldn't matter. He would be up shit creek without a paddle.

After all, Bart didn't happen to have any kryptonite.

About Billy Wells

Thanks for reading my book. I hope you enjoyed it.

As a boy, I read a story entitled The October Game by Ray Bradbury in an Alfred Hitchcock anthology paperback. That story not only chilled me to the bone, but it inspired me to write horror stories of my own. I submitted one of my early attempts, Black As Night, to Ruth Tisinger, my high school English teacher. Knowing she hated scary stories and would be grading it for the next day's class at night, I included the following note at the end of the story for additional effect, "Now, Mrs. Tisinger, as you sit streaking my paper with scarlet, someone could be watching you through the window. Are you alone?"

From those humble beginnings, I have written 183 short stories, mostly horror, with surprise endings. I've seen more movies than anyone I've ever known and enjoy most genres, but a good horror film has always been my favorite. My dream would be to see some of the stories in this book in a movie or a TV show.

Reviews In Today's World

In the past, when everyone knew everyone else in their neighborhood, people used to share information about the good and bad things they discovered to help each other in their day-to-day living.

Now, in this global village where we are in touch with everyone and everything in nanoseconds, book retailers monitor what readers say about what they read in order to distinguish the good from the bad.

Since reviews are the life's blood of today's authors, and we depend on them more than ever before, I would sincerely appreciate it if you would place a review of this book on smashwords.com or goodreads.com. It does not have to be long; only a minimum of twenty words is required.

If you take the time to review any of my horror collections, I will hold you in high regard for all eternity and

may include you in my will.

Other Books by Billy Wells

Don’t Look Behind You: A Collection of Horror
Black As Night
Shivers & Other Nightmares
Scary Stories: A Collection of Horror –Vol. 1
Scary Stories: A Collection of Horror –Vol. 2
Scary Stories: A Collection of Horror –Vol. 3
Scary Stories: A Collection of Horror –Vol. 4
Scary Stories: A Collection of Horror---Vol. 5
Scare Factory
Midnight Snacks
Stories To Make Your Skin Crawl